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REVIEW: Loosening Corsets: The Heroic Life of Georgia's Feisty Mrs. Felton, First Woman Senator of the United States

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Off the SHELF

The Georgia Library Quarterly reviews books on aspects of life in Georgia and the South, including history, literature, politics, education, and genealogy. Materials written by Southern authors or published by regional publishers may also be considered, as well as those on libraries and librarianship.

Special thanks from the full GLQ Editorial Board to Patty Phipps of Georgia Tech. Patty organized the GLQ book review index that is now available online. This project involved locating specific issues from earlier years to verify review information. Her contributions are evident throughout *Off the Shelf*, Vol. 43, and will continue to impact this section.

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NON-FICTION

Loosening Corsets: The Heroic Life of Georgia's Feisty Mrs. Felton, First Woman Senator of the United States by A. Louise Staman (Tiger Iron Press, 2006, ISBN 978-0-9787263-1-7, \$24.95).



In her engaging and well-documented biography of Rebecca Ann Latimer Felton (1835-1930), Louise Staman tells a tale stranger and more fascinating than fiction. Born into the antebellum plantation life and mindset and a bride at 18, Felton survived the Civil War, the deaths of her children, dislocation, near destruction of her farm, Reconstruction and its aftermath. She adapted quickly, growing in confidence, determination, sense of purpose, and political acumen. Decades ahead of her time, Felton was a prolific speaker and writer of books and hundreds of articles crusading for women's rights, education for all — black and white, prison reform, and an end to corruption in state government. She courageously took on the power brokers and corrupt officials of the period. Unusually well-educated for a woman of the time, Felton read constantly and thus became an expert in animal husbandry. An astute businesswoman, she skillfully managed her 600 acre farm near Cartersville: buying and selling land, growing cotton, and breeding fine horses.

Her involvement allowed her physician/minister/politician husband to pursue his own callings. Denounced from pulpits and in the State Legislature, by newspaper editors and politicians for breaking free of the limitations of traditional southern womanhood, she was nevertheless undaunted. She founded a number of women's organizations, bought and ran her own newspaper, and became a suffragist at 80. Amazingly, the Georgia governor, an anti-suffragist himself, appointed her at 87 to fill a vacancy from Georgia in the U.S. Senate. She was a friend of Margaret Mitchell's; it seems a number of incidents in *Gone With the Wind* were inspired by her life, such as creating a gown from household draperies. *Loosening Corsets* is suitable for grades 9-12 through adult. An outstanding addition to high school, public and academic libraries. A must for regional collections. »

— Reviewed by **Eugenia Abbey**
Georgia Perimeter College

Sea of Gray: The Around-the-World Odyssey of the Confederate Raider Shenandoah by Tom Chaffin (Hill and Wang, 2006; ISBN 0-8090-9511-4, \$25.00).

In Tom Chaffin's new historical work, *Sea of Gray*, the author explores the naval strategy of the Confederate

